Ft Roosevelt G-5 (1948-1967) 1947 MA11 Kurd MA11
Mahabad

THE
MIDDLE EAST
JOURNAL

VOLUME I JULY 1947 NUMBER 3

THE KURDISH REPUBLIC OF MAHABAD

Archie Roosevelt, Jr.

180
668

THE DREAM of Kurdish nationalists, an independent Kurdistan, was realized on a miniature scale in Iran from December 1945 to December 1946. The origin of the little Kurdish Republic, its brief and stormy history, and its sudden collapse is one of the more illuminating stories of the contemporary Middle East. Its strangely discordant themes of tribal warfare, rival imperialisms and social systems, medieval chivalry and idealistic nationalism well illustrate the complexity of the Kurdish picture, involving as it does a people never united and now split among five nations, none of which is sympathetic to Kurdish nationalist aspirations.

[H] Mr. Roosevelt, Jr., served as Assistant Military Attaché in Tehran from March 1946 to February 1947. During this period he made a special study of the Kurdish situation and was one of four Americans to visit Mahabad during the brief existence of the Kurdish Republic.

Pr Roosevelt G-S (1946-1947) 1947 MA11 Kurd MA11
Mahabad

101 In September 1941, the British and Soviet forces invaded Iran,
131 toppling over the structure painfully erected by Reza Shah
648 Pahlavi. As his soldiers scattered, they sold or surrendered their arms to the tribes which still roamed the desolate mountains of Iran, holding to their organization, mores, and way of life in spite of the old Shah's efforts to subdue them. Among those thus benefiting from the Iranian collapse were the Kurdish tribes occupying the mountains along the Iraqi and Turkish borders from Maku, in the shadow of Mount Ararat in the north, to Qasr-i-Shirin, on the Kermanshah-Baghdad road in the south.

In the north, the Kurdish tribes in the mountains west of Lake Urmieh found themselves contained by the strong Soviet garrisons in Rezaieh, Shahpur, Khoi, and Maku. In the absence of effective Iranian authority, the Soviets maintained direct relations with the tribes — the Jalali in the north, the Shikak in the mountains west of Shahpur, and the Herki west of Rezaieh. The chiefs of these tribes were allowed to manage their own affairs by the Soviets, who only required that they maintain security and provide grain for the Red Army. At the southern extreme of the Kurdish area, near the Kermanshah-Baghdad road — one of the main supply links between the Western Allies and the Soviet Union — British troops kept the tribes quiet.

622 It was in the large area between the British and Soviet forces,
648 in the vacuum left by the fleeing Iranians, that the Kurds were able to regain their autonomy. At first the two main centers of disturbance were Merivan and the Awroman Mountains, where Mahmud Khan of Kani-Shean established a precarious hegemony; and Baneh, where Hama Rashid Khan, long in exile in Iraq, built up a principality which included Saqqiz and Sardasht. Both of these tribal chiefs were recognized for a time by the Iranian Government as semi-official governors of their areas, but were then driven into Iraq by the reorganized Iranian Army. By the fall of 1945, all of Kurdistan south of the Saqqiz-Baneh-Sardasht line was again firmly in government hands. The vacuum was thus reduced to the small area between this line and the Soviet forces based on Rezaieh, in which there was only one town of any size — Mahabad, formerly known as Sauj Bulagh, a few miles south of Lake Urmieh.

ft Roosevelt G-S (1946-1947) 1947 MA11 Kurd MA11
Mahabad

Northwestern Iran, 1946

[p.249]

Fr Roosevelt G-S (1946-1947) 1947 MA11 Kurd MA11
Mahabad

FORMATION OF THE KOMALA

186 609 668 It was in this town of Mahabad, left to its own devices by the Allies, that the most recent of the Kurdish nationalist movements was born. On August 16, 1943, a dozen young Kurds, most of them small merchants and petty officials of the town, founded the Komala-i-Zhian-i-Kurd, or "Committee of Kurdish Youth." For purposes of secrecy, the membership of the new party was kept below 100 and was organized in cells; the semi-weekly meetings were never held in the same house twice in succession. The Constitution of the Komala was strongly nationalist and membership was restricted to persons of Kurdish descent on both sides of the family, the only exception being for those with an Assyrian mother — an indication of the present close relations between Kurds and Assyrians.

The Komala spread rapidly, not only in Iran but in other countries as well, where Kurds saw in the new group a more vigorous force than in the traditional Kurdish nationalist parties. Chapters of the Komala were founded in the Iraqi towns of Mosul, Kirkuk, Erbil, Suleimania, Rowanduz, and Shaklawa; and there was a chapter functioning even in Turkey, where Kurdish nationalist activity is an offense punishable by death. The chiefs of the tribes in the vicinity of Mahabad also sent emissaries offering help. They were told that they were not needed then, but might be called on in the future.

177 668 It was inevitable that the two great powers primarily interested in the area should eventually hear of the Komala. The British, whose Kirkuk oil fields are located in Kurdish country, kept a watchful eye on developments. Their political adviser in Mosul sometimes ranged as far as Mahabad, while his subordinates were stationed in Rowanduz, Kirkuk, Erbil, and Suleimania. Yet the British could not encourage Kurdish aspirations without arousing Arab resentment, and so remained deaf to the overtures of the Kurdish nationalists.

SOVIET INFILTRATION

With the Soviets it was a different story. At first they were evidently unprepared for active work among the Kurds, although

St Roosevelt G-5 (1946-1947) 1947 MA11 Kurd MA11
Mahabad

177 668 they did once in 1942, invite the leading aghas to Baku. In the spring of that year, when the Kurds raided some villages west of Lake Urmieh the Soviets even brought back the Iranian army and gendarmrie (though they rendered their possible services ineffective by constant interference). Yet the Soviets eventually realized the potentialities of the situation. The year 1944 saw Azerbaijan and Kurdistan filled with Soviet political officers and other agents, mostly Moslems from Soviet Azerbaijan. The work in Kurdistan centered around the Soviet Consulate in Rezaieh, attached to which was at least one of the Soviet Union's 100,000 Kurds, known as "Captain Jafarov," who wandered freely among the tribesmen and villagers in Kurdish dress.

Soviet activty in Mahabad dates from the time two of these agents, known as "Abdullahov" and "Hajiov," appeared, ostensibly to buy horses for the Red Army. Apparently a chance encounter first brought them into contact with the Kurdish nationalist movement. The story is that Abdullahov met a man [578] dressed in Kudish costume in an Armenian wine-shop in Mahabad and complimented him on wearing the national dress.[1] This attention aroused the interest of the Kurd, who happened to be one of the founders of the Komala. They fell into conversation, and finaly the Kurd asked whether the Soviets would furnish arms if the Kurds were to form a nationalist party. Abdullahov parried with the question, "Who are you afraid of?" The Kurd said that they feared only their own khans. Abdullahov replied with an expression of contempt for the khans; the Kurd then brought him to a private home where he introduced him to the other leaders of the Komala. Further contacts with Soviet authorities were arranged and one of the Komala leaders who knew Russian became the party's liaison officer. From that time, although the party program called for appeals to each of the Big

[1] Kurdish dress consists of a rounded turban of blue silk, embroidered vest, baggy grey trousers of homespun wool, and a huge crimson kummerband, intricately knotted in front, from which protrudes a pipe, the stem of a tobacco pouch, and a long, curved dagger. The Kurds, like other Iranians forced to abandon their native dress by Reza Shah, kept their clothes hidden in their homes, a symbol of their ancestral pride, until the Allied invasion, when they suddenly blossomed out in them. Indeed, the tribesmen, safe in their mountains, had never really abandoned them. The Kurds are incorrigible dandies and a poor man among them would rather spend his last coins on a fine sash than on a good meal. Reza Shah's restrictions on their dress had served to make him and his regime all the more cord.

291 186 556 578

ft Roosevelt G-5 (1946-1947) 1947 MA11 Kurd MA11
Mahabad

177
448

Three impartially, the Komala moved inevitably into the Soviet orbit.

During this period VOKS, the Soviet international propaganda organization, was starting a number of "Iranian-Soviet Cultural Relations Societies" in all sections of Iran. As the Komala had grown too big to continue meeting in private homes, its leaders now asked the Soviets to found a branch in Mahabad; they hoped thus to obtain a place to meet without attracting too much attention. The Soviets readily complied, and it was founded, not as a branch of the Iranian-Soviet Relations Society, but as the "Kurdistan-Soviet Cultural Relations Society" (Anjoman-i-Farhangi-i-Kurdistan-o-Shuravi). The clubhouse was soon crowded with Kurds, who showed their gratitude to their new patrons by sending ten cases of cigarettes made of Kurdish tobacco to the victors of Leningrad.

186
536
448

It was at a ceremony in the society's clubhouse, in April 1945, that the Komala finally came into the open. The Soviet Consul from Rezaieh and the chief of VOKS in Azerbaijan were honored guests. The main feature of the program was an "opera" in which a woman called "Daik Nishteman" (Mother Native Land) was represented as abused by three ruffians, "Iraq," "Iran," and "Turkey," finally to be rescued by her stalwart sons. The audience, unused to dramatic representations, was deeply moved, and blood-feuds generations old were composed as life-long enemies fell weeping on each other's shoulders and swore to avenge Kurdistan.

177
622
448

At this ceremony the future head of the Kurdish state, Qazi Mohammad, was finally admitted to the party, to the gratification of the Soviets, who had not liked the democratic organization of the Komala and had long been looking for someone on whom they could count to lead it according to their suggestions. At first the Soviets, realizing the strength of the tribes, had approached tribal chiefs with requests to lead the nationalist movement. But only three of them commanded sufficient prestige for the task — Qaranei Agha Rais-ol-Ashair, venerable chief of the Mamesh and the acknowledged leader of the federation of which they were a part; Amr Khan Sharifi, chief of the Shikak and "grand old man" of Kurdistan; and Amir Asad of the Dehbokri, die-hard

Fr Roosevelt G-S (1946-1947) 1947 MA11 Kurd MA11
Mahabad

[47]
622
68

conservative who, as honorary chief of the gendarmerie, had been made responsible for security of the area by the Iranian Government. But Soviet overtures to each met only polite evasion.

Thus it was that the Soviets finally turned to Qazi Mohammad, hereditary judge and religious leader of Mahabad, and a member of its most respected family. They were frequent guests at his house and eventually helped him, through pressure on the Iranian Government, to replace Amir Asad as government representative in the area, by his brother Seif Qazi, who took over the title of Commander of the Gendarmerie. Qazi Mohammad is said to have learned of the Komala only about a year after its formation, when he sent emissaries discreetly offering his adherence. Komala leaders had decided not to admit him, fearing that because of his strong and authoritarian character and also because of the deference which they themselves had been accustomed since childhood to show him and his family, he would eventually dominate the party and end its democratic character. When at Soviet insistence the Komala finally did admit him, there came about precisely the result they feared — one-man rule of the party.

Qazi's admission enabled the Soviets to draw the Kurds rapidly into line with Soviet policy, which, by the summer of 1945, began to reflect the growing aggressiveness shown by the Soviets elsewhere. Previously the instrument of Soviet penetration in Iran had been the Tudeh Party, a popular front of Iranian left-wingers which, although successful in other parts of Iran, had never been able to take root in Kurdistan.[3] Now, however, the Soviets were considering a new and ambitious plan — the attachment of northwestern Iran to the Soviet Union. Accordingly they formed an independence party to replace the Tudeh in Azerbaijan, a party which could then without embarrassing the Tudeh in other parts of Iran stage a revolution, declare the province independent, and possibly request incorporation in the Soviet Union. Obedient to Soviet orders, the Tudeh abolished itself and re-formed as the "Democrat Party of Azerbaijan," whereupon it began to use Azerbaijani Turkish as its official language and to demand separation from Iran.

[3] For a discussion of the Tudeh Party, see George Lenczowski, "The Communist Movement in Iran," *Middle East Journal*, I (1947), pp. 29-45. [Source # 24]

Roosevelt G-6 (1946-1947) 1947 MA11 Kurd MA11
Mahabad

177 668 The Kurds of western Azerbaijan — which includes Mahabad — could hardly have been expected to join a party purportedly dedicated to Azerbaijani Turkish nationalism, so a new party had to be formed to fit them into the Soviet scheme. On September 12, Captain Namazaliev, Soviet Town Commandant in Miandoab, summoned the chiefs of the important Kurdish tribes, together with Qazi Mohammad and Seif Qazi, to Tabriz ostensibly to see the Soviet Consul. When they arrived, the bewildered Kurds were suddenly told to proceed to the railway station, where they were hustled onto a train and taken to Baku. For three days they lived in a villa outside the town and were entertained with tours, the theater, and the opera. On the fourth day they were ushered in to see Bagherov, President of the Azerbaijan S.S.R., who harangued them regarding the wrongs they had suffered under Reza Shah, and said that the Soviet Government would help the new Democrat Party, which was dedicated to freedom for the oppressed and which he strongly urged them to join. He condemned both the Tudeh Party, which he characterized as a group of ineffective trouble-makers, and the Komala, which he said was started in Iraq under the auspices of British intelligence and was nothing but an instrument of British imperialism. Then, after a warning not to say anything about the trip, the Kurds were put on the train to Tabriz, where they were loaded into Red Army vehicles and driven off to their homes.

THE DEMOCRAT PARTY OF KURDISTAN

186 668 The results of the expedition were soon apparent. Shortly after his return, Qazi Mohammad called a meeting of Kurdish notables to announce the formation of the Democrat Party of Kurdistan, which he urged all to join. Concluding from its name that the goal of the party was democracy on the American model, many responded enthusiastically. A manifesto, signed by Qazi Mohammad and 105 leading Kurds, was issued; it stated that the Kurdish people now wished "to take advantage of the liberation of the world from Fascism and to share in the promises of the Atlantic Charter." The declaration said that the Kurds wished nothing but the human and constitutional rights denied them by Reza Shah, and listed their aims as follows:

Pr Roosevelt G-5 (1946-1947) 1947 MA11 Kurd MA11
Mahabad

668 1. The Kurdish people in Iran should have freedom and self-government in the administration of their local affairs, and obtain autonomy within the limits of the Iranian State.

186 2. The Kurdish language should be used in education and be the official language in administrative affairs.

3. The provincial council of Kurdistan should be immediately elected according to constitutional law and should supervise and inspect all state and social matters.

4. All state officials must be of local origin.

5. A single law for both peasants and notables should be adopted and the future of both secured.

6. The Kurdish Democrat Party will make a special effort to establish unity and complete fraternity with the Azerbaijani people and the other peoples that live in Azerbaijan (Assyrians, Armenians, etc.) in their struggle.

7. The Kurdish Democrat Party will strive for the improvement of the moral and economic state of the Kurdish people through the exploration of Kurdistan's many natural resources, the progress of agriculture and commerce, and the development of hygiene and education.

8. We desire that the peoples living in Iran be able to strive freely for the happiness and progress of their country.

The manifesto ended in Soviet style with the words, "Long Live Kurdish Democratic Autonomy!"

The formation of the new party resulted in the dissolution of
668 the Komala and the absorption of its members by the Democrats. Yet from the beginning the tribal chiefs, fearful of communism, were wary of the new party, though many signed a pledge of support presented them by a Soviet political officer touring the tribal areas. This underlying tribal opposition would have made Qazi Mohammad's position untenable had it not been for a fortuitous accession of strength which arrived from Iraq — Mulla Mustafa and his Barzanis.

The Barzanis had been even in Ottoman times one of the most
668 troublesome of all the Kurdish tribes. In the 1920's Sheikh Ahmad
619 of Barzan, considered a god by the Barzanis and neighboring tribes, frequently rebelled against the British, who several times were forced to call in the R.A.F. Finally Sheikh Ahmad, his younger brother Mulla Mustafa, and his principal followers were exiled, first in southern Iraq, then in Suleimania. On June 11, 1942, Mulla Mustafa, who had taken over the leadership from his brother, escaped to Barzan.

Pr Roosevelt G-S (1946-1947) 1947 MA11 Kurd MA11
Mahabad

668
619

The story of Mulla Mustafa's subsequent struggle with the Iraqi Government, of how he twice defeated the Iraqi army in 1945, and how by judicious use of funds the Iraqi Minister of Interior was able to enlist other Kurdish tribes against him and drive him from Barzan, must be told x another time. Suffice it to say that on October 11, 1945, Mulla Mustafa, Sheikh Ahmad, and about 1,000 armed Barzanis and their families entered Iran at a point north of Ushnuieh. With them were a number of Iraqi petty officials and schoolteachers of Kurdish descent, and Kurdish deserters from the Iraqi army and gendarmerie, including twelve army officers. The latter were men of high caliber, several of whom had been trained in England and had held positions on the Iraqi general staff.

Shortly after his arrival in Iran, the Mulla met a number of Soviet officers, including the general commanding Soviet forces in western Azerbaijan. The Soviets told him to place himself under the orders of Qazi Mohammad, and ordered the local Kurds to feed and house the destitute Barzanis. By the end of October the Mulla's forces, swollen by refugees and adventurers from Iraq, numbered nearly 3,000 men armed with British rifles captured from the Iraqi army, machine guns, and one field piece.

THE KURDISH PEOPLE'S GOVERNMENT

In November and early December, Soviet agents circulated among the tribes, telling them to mobilize for the coming struggle for independence and ordering the chiefs to assemble in Mahabad. All co-operated with the exception of the Mamesh, the Mangur, and the Dehbokri. Meanwhile in the rest of Azerbaijan the position of the Iranian Government was rapidly deteriorating. Armed "Democrats," many of them from Soviet Azerbaijan or the Caucasus, began to attack Iranian soldiers and gendarmes, who soon hardly dared leave their barracks. The whole province was in open "rebellion," while the Red Army stopped relief columns sent north by the Central Government to reinforce its hard-pressed garrisons. Finally, on December 10 the Democrats attacked the garrison in Tabriz and forced it to surrender. All eastern Azerbaijan then fell under the control of the newly-formed "Azerbaijan People's Government."

Pr Roosevelt G-3 (1946-1947) 1947 MA11 Kurd MA11
Mahabad

668 692 The fall of Tabriz was the cue for Qazi Mohammad to declare his own area independent — which it had long been in fact. On December 15 at a meeting in Mahabad attended by tribal chiefs, the leaders of the new Kurdish Democrat Party, Mulla Mustafa, and three Soviet officers in a jeep and armed with tommy-guns, he solemnly inaugurated the Kurdish People's Government and raised the Kurdish flag. A national parliament of thirteen members was formed, and on January 22, 1946, Qazi Mohammad was elected president of the new republic. The Minister of War was his cousin, Mohammad Hosein Khan Seif Qazi, a merchant whose military reputation rested on his honorary rank of captain in the Iranian gendarmerie. Seif Qazi, Mulla Mustafa, Amr Khan Shikak, Hama Rashid Khan Banei (just returned from Iraq with his tribesmen), and Zero Beg Herki[1] received the rank of "marshal," and were provided with Soviet uniforms, complete with high boots, stiff shoulder-straps, and red-banded garrison caps.[2]

578 668 The new government, which controlled only a minute territory including the towns of Mahabad, Bokan, Naqadeh, and Ushnuieh, sent observers to the opening of the Azerbaijan National Parliament and even convoked a miniature parliament of its own. It also dispatched Mulla Mustafa south to fight the Iranian garrisons in Saqqiz, Baneh, and Sardasht, cut off from each other and their base in Senandaj by the heavy winter snows.

RELATIONS WITH TABRIZ AND TEHRAN

Meanwhile in the north the capture of Rezaieh by the Azerbaijani Democrats brought new problems to the Kurdish government. Although the majority of the inhabitants of the plains west

177 622 624 645 [1] Zero Beg was a bandit chief originally associated with the famous Shikak rebel chief, Simitko. Upon the latter's defeat and murder by Reza Shah, Zero Beg fled to Iraq, returning in 1941 to carve out a domain for himself in the Barandus Valley. He was often seen with Soviet political officers and seems to have been their favored protégé. Although of little importance in his own tribe, the Herki, most of whom still followed their hereditary chiefs, these Soviet connections enabled him to play an important role in developments in Kurdistan.

[2] Other officials of the new government were Hajji Baba Sheikh, local religious leader, Prime Minister; Sadiq Haideri, Minister of Works and Propaganda; Nazaf Karimi, Minister of Education; Mohammad Amin Ma'ani, Minister of Commerce; Ahmad Elahi, Minister of the Treasury; Seyyid Mohammad Tabatabaeh, Minister of Health; and Khalil Khosrovi, Minister of the Interior. Only one of these men had been among the founders of the Komala, but all belonged to the middle or upper classes — small merchants, officials, landlords.

Pr Roosevelt G-S (1946-1947) 1947 MA11 Kurd MA11
Mahabad

177
578
48

of Lake Urmieh, from Rezaieh north to Maku, are Azerbaijani Turks, the tribes of the hills commanding the plains are Kurds. The Miandoab area, southeast of the lake, also has a mixed population. These areas were claimed by both the Tabriz and the Mahabad governments and were a source of constant friction. Amr Khan and the tribes paid little attention to the Azerbaijani Democrats, and were continually encroaching on the villages and towns presumably under the control of Tabriz. In April 1946, the Soviets brought Qazi Mohammad to Tabriz in an attempt to settle the differences between the Azerbaijanis and the Kurds. It was essential at that time that the two puppet states form a united front, as negotiations were about to open between the Democrats and the Iranian Government for a permanent settlement of the status of the province.

668

The final result of talks between Pishevari, leader of the Azerbaijani Democrats, Qazi Mohammad, and the Soviets was a treaty signed April 23, 1946, by the Kurdish and the Azerbaijani representatives. Publication of this treaty caused consternation in Tehran, as its clauses and indeed its very existence showed that the twin Democrat regimes considered themselves independent nations with the right to exchange representatives and make treaties. The text of the treaty was as follows:

1. The two signatory governments will exchange representatives whenever it is deemed advisable.
2. In those areas of Azerbaijan where there are Kurdish minorities, Kurds will be appointed to government departments, and in those parts of Kurdistan where there are Azerbaijani minorities, Azerbaijanis will be appointed to government departments.
3. A joint economic commission will be formed to solve the economic problems of the signatory nations. Members of this commission will be appointed by the heads of the national governments.
4. The military forces of the signatory nations will assist each other whenever necessary.
5. Any negotiations with the Tehran Government will be conducted in the joint interest of the Azerbaijan and Kurdish national governments.
6. The Azerbaijan National Government will take the necessary steps to promote the use of the Kurdish language and the development of Kurdish culture among the Kurds of Azerbaijan, and the Kurdish National Government will take similar steps with regard to the Azerbaijanis living in Kurdistan.
7. Both signatory nations will take measures to punish any individual or

St Roosevelt G-5 (1946-1947) 1947 MA11 Kurd MA11
Mahabad

649 group seeking to destroy the historic friendship and democratic brotherhood of the Azerbaijanis and the Kurds.[1]

The Azerbaijani Democrats next proceeded to negotiate a settlement in Tehran with the Iranian Premier, Ahmad Qavam. By its terms all Azerbaijan, including the Kurdish areas, became once more nominally part of Iran, while the Democrat leaders were "appointed" to posts in Azerbaijan Province corresponding to those they already held in the Democrat government. The Kurds reacted unfavorably to the agreement. Although they had been represented in at least some of the negotiations by Sadr Qazi, Qazi Mohammad's brother and a deputy in the last Iranian parliament, they felt that their wishes had been largely ignored. Whereas the Azerbaijani Democrats had legalized the positions they had seized, Qazi Mohammad's government now had no legal basis at all. The Kurds had progressed from the condition of a minority in the Iranian state to that of a minority in an Azerbaijani Turkish state.

Finally, Qazi Mohammad himself went to Tehran to voice his disapproval to Premier Qavam. He asked to be made governor of a new Kurdish province consisting of the Kurdish parts of Azerbaijan, combined with the much larger areas inhabited by Kurds still under Iranian control — a territory that would stretch from the Russian border to a point half way between Kermanshah and Senandaj.[2] This new province was to have a degree of local autonomy, with its provincial officials and its army garrison recruited entirely from the local population. The wily Iranian premier agreed to Qazi's proposal, but with the proviso that Qazi must also obtain the consent of Dr. Javid, the Democrat Governor of Azerbaijan. Dr. Javid indignantly rejected the plan, and friction continued between the Kurds and the Azerbaijani Democrats.

Although in the course of these conversations in Tehran a truce

[1] The treaty was signed in Tabriz by Pishevari, Biriya, Dr. Javid, and Sadiq Pishegar for the Azerbaijani Democrats, and by Qazi Mohammad, Seyyid Abdollah Ojjaq, Amir Khan Shikak, Zero Beg Herki, and Rashid Beg Herki for the Kurds.

[2] Senandaj (Sanna) was the capital of the province of Kurdistan, the former independent principality of Ardalan. It included Saqqiz and Banah, but not Sardasht, which was administratively part of Azerbaijan. In the present article the word "Kurdistan" has been used to designate Qazi Mohammad's territory, some of which was in the province of Kurdistan.

Roosevelt G-5 (1946-1947) 1947 MA11 Kurd MA11
Mahabad

668 721 had been agreed upon by the Central Government on the one hand, and the Kurds and Azerbaijanis on the other, sniping and skirmishing continued, occasionally flaring up into open warfare. The Iranians, in view of the declared intention of the Soviets to evacuate Iran early in May,[1] now began to take more active military measures. The Kurdish front was held by the Iranian Fourth Division under the command of tall, able General Homayuni, recently transferred from Khuzistan, where he had carried out a vigorous disarmament program among the Arab tribes. In mid-April, Homayuni opened the roads and rushed reinforcements to Saqqiz, Baneh, and Sardasht.

The Soviets were said to have promised the Kurds planes, tanks, and heavy weapons, and to have taken some fifty young Kurds to Baku for military and political training. For the present, however, Qazi Mohammad had to rely on tribal levies to oppose the Iranians. In the hills overlooking General Homayuni's forces was a formidable but divided force consisting principally of the Barzanis, but also including small Kurdish tribes always ready for fighting and looting, and Hama Rashid and his henchmen.[2]

As General Homayuni pulled more and more reinforcements into the area, Qazi Mohammad and the Soviets put pressure on Amr Khan of the Shikak and his allies, the Herki, to come down from the north and aid in the operations. At first Amr Khan demurred on the excuse that his horses were in pasture elsewhere and could not be moved, but at the beginning of May he reluctantly sent his tribesmen to the battle zone.

The month of May 1946 was marked by a number of fierce battles, all fought by small numbers and none of them followed through by decisive operations. In the beginning of the month the Kurds won a victory damaging to Iranian prestige when they surprised an army column on a road march near Saqqiz, killed twenty, and captured thirty-odd prisoners, two machine guns, and 4,000 rounds of ammunition. The Kurdish prisoners were conscripted in the Kurdish army; the rest were sent to Tabriz.

[1] The Red Army finally evacuated Iran on May 9, 1946.

[2] Hama Rashid was of dubious value to the Kurds, as he was continually carrying on secret negotiations with the Iranian army for his reinstatement as Governor of Baneh, and was also suspected by both Kurds and Iranians of a mysterious connection with the British. In August, hearing that plans were being made in Mahabad to have him murdered, Hama Rashid fled back into Iraq.

Pr Roosevelt G-8 (1946-1947) 1947 MA11 Kurd MA11
Mahabad

668 721 The Kurds were repulsed, however, in an attack on the Ishmudabad Pass near Saqqiz, designed to cut the Sanandaj road, and again later after they had seized the hills overlooking Saqqiz. The Iranian army drove them off and erected round watch-towers of mud on the summits, each manned by thirty or forty soldiers. Finally a truce was effected whereby liaison officers were exchanged,[1] each side was to stay within its lines, and the Kurds were to have the right to inspect vehicles going from Saqiz to Baneh and Sardasht and so stop arms and ammunition from reaching the Iranian garrisons there. The Shikak and the Herki returned to the north.

CHARACTER OF QAZI MOHAMMAD AND THE KURDISH REPUBLIC

186 609 After this period of conflict, Qazi Mohammad drew aside his iron curtain and gave non-Soviet observers a chance to look at his country. Although feeling against the British on account of the expulsion of the Barzanis from Iraq, Soviet-sponsored anti-British propaganda, and certain events in the past in which the Kurds considered they had been victims of British opportunism, was too strong to permit them to visit the tiny Kurdish Republic, at various times four Americans and one Frenchman were guests of Qazi Mohammad.

These observers found the Kurdish Republic to be a going concern. 642 621 Although destitute of any legal basis whatsoever, Qazi Mohammad's *de facto* government continued as before, changing only the title of its ministers from *wazir* (minister) to *rais* (chief). 624 Qazi Mohammad himself became merely the leader of the party (Pishwa-i-Hizb-i-Dimokrat-i-Kurd). The villages were run by their old landlords and tribal leaders with the aid of a gendarmerie locally recruited and dressed in Kurdish costume, but commanded by officers from Mahabad with Soviet uniforms. Mahabad itself, from a typically drab Persian provincial town had become picturesque and colorful, its streets thronging with Kurds in national costume, free for the moment of the hated Iranian soldiers and gendarmes.

[1] The Kurdish liaison officer was "Colonel" Mohammad Nazarzadeh, one of the original founders of the Komala, later killed when the Iranian army plane in which he was traveling crashed near Bandi.

Pr Roosevelt G-S (1946-1947) 1947 MA11 Kurd MA11
Mahabad

Those who had an opportunity to meet Qazi Mohammad could not fail to be impressed with his personality, and easily understood how he had become a symbol for Kurdish nationalists everywhere. A short man of fifty, dressed in an old army overcoat, he had a lightly bearded, ascetic face, slightly yellowish in complexion from a stomach complaint. He neither smoked nor drank and ate very little. His voice was gentle and well-modulated, his gestures quiet but effective. Something of an internationalist, he was interested in all the peoples of the world and knew many languages, including Russian, a little English, and Esperanto. His desk was customarily littered with grammars and readers and literary works in foreign tongues.

He seemed to be a man of deep convictions, backed with a rare courage and self-sacrifice, but tempered with broad-mindedness and moderation. During the period in question, at least, his demands were moderate: Kurdish autonomy within the Iranian state. He professed to share the view of many Kurds that since they were members of the same Iranian racial family as the Persians proper, there was no reason why they could not form the same combination as did the ancient Medes and Persians. Qazi himself thought the Kurds were the descendants of the Medes, and liked to give his own etymology of Mahabad — "abode of the Medes."

Yet it would be impossible to deny that he and his followers also held pan-Kurdish aspirations and hoped to make Mahabad the center of Kurdish culture and the Kurdish nationalist movement, replacing Syria and Suleimania, its centers at the present time. Great efforts were being made to put Kurdish education on a sound footing. At first Kurdish teachers had to translate from Persian textbooks orally in the classroom, but shortly before the fall of the Kurdish Republic, textbooks in Kurdish had been printed for the primary grades. In addition to a newspaper and a political monthly periodical, both called *Kurdistan*, there were published two primarily literary magazines, *Hetar* and *Hilal*.[10] All of these were printed on a press presented by the Red Army to

[10] A number of other Kurdish periodicals had been published during the Komala period, such as *Kelavizh* and, notably *Nizkeman*, official organ of the party, which bore a picture of Saladin on the cover and circulated in Iraq as well as Iran.

Fr Roosevelt G-S (1946-1947) 1947 MA11 Kurd MA11
Mahabad

the Democrat Party of Kurdistan. The importance Qazi Mohammad attached to literature and the Kurdish language may be adduced from the presence on his staff of two young poets, Hazhar and Hiwan, whose poems were published in spite of the paper shortage.

Although these efforts did not suffice during the republic's short life to bring it anywhere near the standard of the other two centers of Kurdish culture where Kurdish has been freely written and taught for twenty-five years, politically at least Mahabad was the focal point toward which all Kurdish eyes now were turned. In intellectual Kurdish circles in Beirut, Istanbul, and Baghdad, as well as among the wild mountains of western Asia, all were watching to see whether Qazi Mohammad would succeed or fail. Couriers brought communications to him from groups of Kurds not only in Iraq but in Syria and Turkey as well. His movement appealed especially to the young people, who felt that the older nationalist parties had not accomplished much. In Iraq, for instance, a new secret party, the leftist "Rizgari," was formed of these elements.

ANTI-SOVIET SENTIMENT

The old nationalist parties, the Hewa in Iraq and the Khoybun in Syria, were not enthusiastic about Qazi Mohammad because of his Soviet connections. Fear and even hatred of the Soviets among the Kurds is strong for several reasons. In the first place, most Kurds are deeply religious and remain distrustful of the Soviet attitude toward religion. Furthermore, many of them have met refugees fresh from the Soviet Union or have talked to Moslems in the Red Army, few of whom paint a rosy picture of the lot of Oriental peoples under Soviet rule. It must also be remembered that the Russians have been traditional enemies of the Kurds since the days of the Tsars. Russian troops in World War I fought over a large part of Kurdistan, leaving a trail of ruin and depopulation still traceable in many Kurdish valleys and villages. In Mahabad itself, Russian troops had been under orders for several days to shoot anyone appearing in the streets, and the town was looted and burned. None of this has been erased from the long oriental memories of the Kurds, who still frighten their crying

Fr Roosevelt G-8 (1946-1947) 1947 MA11 Kurd MA11
Mahabad

177 children into silence by threatening them with the word "Russian."
186 The Soviets tried hard to counteract this unreceptive attitude.
668 They played up "Kurdish autonomy" in the Soviet Union, and the brave deeds of one Samand Siamandov, Red Army colonel of Kurdish origin, "Hero of Leningrad." How much success they had is hard to judge, but certainly large sections of the population, as well as landlords, merchants, and religious leaders, continued to distrust them and to extend this distrust to Qazi Mohammad, whose connection with the Soviets was undeniable. The walls of the building in which his government was housed were plastered solidly with Soviet propaganda posters; his newspapers and magazines contained a large proportion of Soviet material translated word for word into Kurdish; and his poets composed panegyrics to Stalin and the Red Army.

Yet in contrast to the rest of Azerbaijan, Kurdistan was to outside appearances free of Soviet agents. Aside from a few Iran-sovtrans truck drivers, who acted as observers for the Soviet and pro-Soviet governments, Soviet citizens were almost unknown in the area and Soviet agents kept under cover. There was said to be a Soviet representative in residence in Mahabad, though his presence was denied by Kurdish authorities.[9] Hashumov, Soviet Consul in Rezaieh, and his assistant Aliakbarov made occasional trips to Mahabad.

641 While terrorism reigned unchecked in eastern Azerbaijan, in
661 Kurdistan there were few if any political prisoners and only one or two cases of what may have been political assassination, though a number of Kurds not in sympathy with the regime did flee to Tehran. In the streets of Mahabad one could hear radio broadcasts from Ankara or London, while in Tabriz to listen to these brought the death penalty. Whether the reason for this freedom was the moderation and liberalism of Qazi and his cabinet, or the presence of the tribes who would not tolerate violent action against persons connected with them, the net result was to make the regime popular at least among the citizens of Mahabad, who enjoyed their respite from the exactions and oppression they

[9] The last of these Soviet advisers, one Azadov, is said to have been in Mahabad until the last days of the republic, when he fled to the Soviet Consulate in Tabriz.

Fr Roosevelt G-S (1946-1947) 1947 MA11 Kurd MA11
Mahabad

661 641 considered to be characteristic of the central Iranian Government.

OPPOSITION OF THE TRIBES

297 578 661 177 If the Soviets kept their overt interference to a minimum in order to reconcile the tribes to the regime, they were certainly unsuccessful. In addition to historical, social, and religious reasons for the tribes' opposition to the Soviet-supported government, there were strong economic ones. The Kurdish tribesmen depended largely on their tobacco crop for their livelihood, and now that their market in the rest of Iran was cut off they suffered considerable hardship. In certain areas food supplies already strained had to be shared with the destitute Barzanis, who had long outworn their welcome.

This tribal discontent was at its strongest in the south where the deceased Qarani Agha's son, Mam Aziz, chief of the Mamesh, along with his ally, Bayazid Agha of the Mangur, so openly opposed Qazi Mohammad that the Soviet vice-consul finally came down from Rezaieh and threatened to have the Barzanis sent against them. When Mam Aziz continued to resist, the Barzanis did indeed attack him and he was forced to flee to Iraq with some of his tribesmen. From Rezaieh north, the tribes looked to the leadership of Amr Khan Shikak, who had resigned from his position in Qazi's government as minister of war and for the time being was keeping aloof in Zindasht, his mountain capital southwest of Shahpur. The only tribes Qazi Mohammad could count on were the Gawrik of Mahabad, numbering less than a thousand armed men, and part of the small tribe of Zerza, in the Ushnuieh region. Even Mulla Mustafa and his Barzanis did not get on with Qazi Mohammad, who was no longer able to feed them.

668 Thus it was that Qazi Mohammad, in the face of the increasingly aggressive attitude of the Tehran Government, found himself almost without support. Despite Soviet promises of aid and matériel, in the fall of 1946 Qazi Mohammad was still without either heavy weapons or trained men, or indeed any effective army at all. As Iranian preparations became increasingly obvious, Qazi sent frantic messages to the tribes, his only hope, say-

Dr Roosevelt G-6 (1946-1947) 1947 MA11 Kurd MA11
Mahabad

ing that the Soviets had promised the Kurds their support and demanding that the tribes come to the front to fight the Iranian Army. The tribes refused.

RE-ESTABLISHMENT OF IRANIAN CONTROL

Meanwhile, events were moving rapidly. The Tehran Government had been insisting that the Democrats surrender the district of Zenjan, which is not in the province of Azerbaijan. When the Iranians seemed about to back up this demand by force, the Democrats agreed to evacuate the area, and by the end of November it was completely in the hands of the Iranian army. Shortly after midnight, on December 10, the Iranians attacked Democrat positions in the Qaflankuh Pass, south of Mianeh; within twenty-four hours resistance had collapsed and the Democrat leaders were in headlong flight to the Soviet Union, a year to the day after their capture of Tabriz. In his telegram of surrender to Premier Qavam, the Democrat Governor stated that the Kurd commander, Seif Qazi, had been informed of his decision and had been told that he was expected to order his forces to cease hostilities.

On December 13, Qazi Mohammad's brother, Sadr Qazi, a deputy in the Iranian Parliament who had been in Mahabad acting as go-between for his brother and the Iranians, appeared at Miandoab. There he told General Homayuni that the Kurds were ready to receive the Iranian army peacefully. The general said he would move his forces in as soon as the Barzanis were evacuated from the Mahabad area. He sent forward an advance party of pro-government tribesmen, including some of the Dehbokri and the Mamesh and Mangur who had returned from Iraq, under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Ghaffari. These were stopped not far from Mahabad by a representative of Qazi Mohammad who said that the agreement with General Homayuni called for occupation of the town by regular troops, not by tribesmen who might cause disorder. The tribesmen finally retired without fighting, and on December 15, 1946, after the Barzanis had withdrawn to Naqadeh, the Iranian army entered Mahabad, thus bringing to an end the year-old Kurdish Republic.

The Iranian army was given a great reception, and Qazi

8: Roosevelt G-S (1946-1947) 1947 MA11 Kurd MA11
Mahabad

668 Mohammad and the army commanders exchanged visits. But on December 17 a number of Kurds were arrested, and the following day Qazi Mohammad, Seif Qazi, and many others were imprisoned. The only members of Qazi's government to remain at liberty were Hajji Baba Sheikh, immune because of his religious standing, and a handful of Kurds who had fled to Iraq or hidden in the villages. In addition to imprisonment, Kurdish leaders were further punished by having tribesmen quartered in their homes, eating at their expense — a time-honored Iranian method of imposing a fine without holding a trial. On December 30, Sadr Qazi, who had returned to Tehran, was brought from his home to Mahabad and imprisoned with his brother, although he had throughout the year left Tehran only when his services as mediator were required by the Iranian Government. The army asked all persons who had grievances against the prisoners to present their evidence, and after an examination by a military court condemned Qazi Mohammad, Seif Qazi, and Sadr Qazi to death. At dawn on March 31, 1947, they were hanged in the square of Mahabad.

The Iranian military government has carried out a program to eradicate all traces of Qazi Mohammad's regime. The Kurdish printing press was closed, the teaching of Kurdish prohibited, and all books in Kurdish were publicly burned. To show the tribes it meant business, the army executed eleven petty tribal chiefs of the Faizollah Begi and the Gawrik of Saqqiz.

One feature in the reconquest of Mahabad needs to be noted. Everywhere else in Azerbaijan, peasants, workers, and shopkeepers massacred the Democrats at the first indication of their collapse. This spontaneous reaction clearly indicated the hatred felt by the people for the regime. Yet in Mahabad, all passed peacefully, a circumstance especially remarkable in that elsewhere in Azerbaijan the secret police was strong and prepared for such emergencies, while Qazi Mohammad did not even have such an instrument. This fact would tend to confirm reports that Qazi Mohammad's regime was popular — at least in his own capital.

In the north, Amir Khan and the tribes under his influence took no active part in these events. The Iranian army, evidently not

Pr Roosevelt G-S (1945-1947) 1947 MA11 Kurd MA11
Mahabad

449 wishing to incur obligations, had not informed Amr Khan of its projected move into Azerbaijan, and so by the time he had gathered his tribesmen to attack the Democrats, the war was over. Amr Khan and the other chiefs quickly sent the Iranian commander professions of loyalty. All were accepted back in the fold except Zero Beg, whose tribesmen ambushed some Iranian soldiers in Balanesh, near Rezaieh, while he was conferring there with General Homayuni. Zero consequently had to flee, accompanied by a few tribesmen and Assyrians, to Ushnuiah, where he found Mulla Mustafa and his Barzanis in a state of precarious truce with the Central Government. The Mulla finally refused the government's order to disarm his tribesmen or return to Iraq, and fighting broke out again. By June 1947 the Barzanis had fought their way north to Maku and seemed about to cross the border into the Soviet Union.

IN SUMMARY

177 This latest attempt to found a Kurdish state ended with the
186 Iranian occupation of Mahabad. Like previous attempts it failed
441 largely because of disunity among the Kurds themselves. One of the dilemmas of Kurdish nationalism is that while not only its leaders, but nearly all its rank and file, must come from the more enlightened townspeople, its military strength has always had to come from the tribes and their chiefs, with neither the education nor the imagination to look for anything but gain and loss in the weakening of government authority. During 1946 the Kurdish tribes, naturally opposed to government control, felt as restive under Qazi Mohammad as they had under the Central Government, even though he was of their own race. Because of this feeling, as well as their distrust of Qazi's Soviet connections, the tribes almost all sided with the Iranian army.

The principal immediate reason for the collapse of the republic was the failure of Soviet support to materialize. A young and strong nationalist party which might have united a majority of educated Kurds was infiltrated by foreigners who used it for their own purposes and then let it be destroyed. The miniature state had been built under the protection of the Red Army, and continued to exist after its evacuation only because of the possibility

Fr Roosevelt G-5 (1946-1947) 1947 MA11 Kurd MA11
Mahabad

of its return. When the Kurds no longer hoped for this, and the Iranians no longer feared it, there was no chance for Qazi Mohammad's movement to survive.

The whole episode was a serious blow to the development of Kurdish nationalism. There is now no Komala and no Democrat Party of Kurdistan, and many of the potential leaders of the Kurds are dead, in prison, or in exile. Yet this does not mean that Kurdish nationalism is finished. The Kurdish Republic found its support among those progressive elements of the population which seem bound to increase in numbers and importance, and was opposed by those elements which seem destined to disappear. It remains to be seen whether Kurdish nationalism is practical in an area where, until recently, nationalism was an unknown conception and men still give primary allegiance to their religious and tribal chiefs. The Kurds have never been combined in a stable state of their own and enjoy no ancient unifying culture. Separated from each other by mountain barriers, they have always had to look for their cultural and economic needs to the capitals of the different states in which they have lived.

If the states the Kurds inhabit allow their Kurdish populations a degree of local autonomy and give up the attempt to force an alien nationalism upon them, they may succeed in obtaining a loyalty similar to that found in Switzerland with its multinational population. The Arab countries have made a start in this direction. A similar policy in Iran, if left free of foreign penetration, might be a cause of closer unity rather than of separatism between two of the nation's peoples.